What is claimed is:

1.   A method in an interactive television system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the method comprising:

  detecting a request to establish video communication between a caller and a user of the interactive television system;

  identifying the caller from information contained within the request;

  notifying the user concerning the identity of the caller; and

  in response to the user rejecting the request or not accepting the request within an established time interval:

  sending a pre-recorded video greeting to the caller; and

  recording a video message comprising a video signal received from the caller.

2.   The method of claim 1, wherein identifying comprises:

  extracting an identifier of the caller from the request.

3.   The method of claim 2, wherein the identifier is selected from the group consisting of a name of the caller, a network address of the caller, a network address of an interactive television system of the caller, an image depicting the caller, and a video signal depicting the caller.

4.   The method of claim 1, wherein the request comprises a video signal generated by a video camera associated with the caller, and wherein notifying comprises:

  displaying the video signal on a display device of the interactive television system.

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5.   The method of claim 4, wherein displaying comprises:

displaying the video signal in a Picture-in-Picture (PIP) window on the

display device.

6.   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

while the video message is being recorded, establishing two-way video

communication between the user and the caller in response to a

user command.

7.   The method of claim 6, wherein recording of the video message

continues during the two-way video communication.

8.   The method of claim 7, wherein the two-way video communication

comprises incoming and outgoing video signals, the method further comprising:

storing the incoming and outgoing video signals.

9.   The method of claim 6, further comprising:

buffering a television signal being currently displayed by the interactive

television system.

10.   The method of claim 9, wherein buffering comprises:

encoding the television broadcast; and

storing the encoded television broadcast in a storage device.

11.   The method of claim 9, further comprising:

in response to the two-way video communication being terminated,

playing back the television signal being buffered from a point in

time at which the two-way video communication was

established.

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12. The method of claim 1, wherein the pre-recorded video greeting is caller-specific.

13. A method in an interactive television system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the method comprising:

5   detecting a request to establish video communication between a caller and a user of the interactive television system;

identifying the caller from information contained within the request;

determining whether the caller is identified within an auto-answer list; and

10   in response to the caller being included within the auto-answer list:

automatically sending a pre-recorded video greeting to the caller; and

automatically recording a video message comprising a video signal received from the caller.

15   14. A method in an interactive television system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the method comprising:

detecting a request to establish video communication between a caller and a user of the interactive television system;

identifying the caller from information contained within the request;

20   notifying the user concerning the identity of the caller; and

in response to the user rejecting the request or not accepting the request within an established time interval:

sending a pre-recorded video greeting to the caller;

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recording a video message comprising a video signal received

from the caller;

while the video message is being recorded, establishing two-

way video communication between the user and the

5   caller in response to a user command;

buffering a television signal being displayed by the interactive

television system; and

in response to the two-way video communication being

terminated, playing back the television signal being

10   buffered from a point in time at which the two-way video

communication was established.

15.   A system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the

system comprising:

a detection component configured to detect a request to establish

video communication between a caller and a user of the

15   interactive television system;

an identification component configured to identify the caller from

information contained within the request;

a notification component configured to notify the user concerning the

20   identity of the caller; and

an answering component configured to send a pre-recorded video

greeting to the caller and to record a video message comprising

a video signal received from the caller in response to the user

rejecting the request or not accepting the request within an

25   established time interval.

16.   The system of claim 15, wherein the identification component is further configured to extract an identifier of the caller from the request.

17.   The system of claim 16, wherein the identifier is selected from the group consisting of a name of the caller, a network address of the caller, a network address of an interactive television system of the caller, an image depicting the caller, and a video signal depicting the caller.

18.   The system of claim 15, wherein the request comprises a video signal generated by a video camera associated with the caller, and wherein the notification component is further configured to display the video signal on a display device of the interactive television system.

19.   The system of claim 18, wherein the notification component is further configured to display the video signal in a Picture-in-Picture (PIP) window on the display device.

20.   The system of claim 15, further comprising:

        a communication component configured to establish two-way video
        communication between the user and the caller while the video
        message is being recorded.

21.   The system of claim 20, wherein recording of the video message continues during the two-way video communication.

22.   The system of claim 21, wherein the two-way video communication comprises incoming and outgoing video signals, and wherein the answering component is further configured to store the incoming and outgoing video signals.

23. The system of claim 20, further comprising:

a buffering component configured to buffer a television signal being

currently displayed by the interactive television system.

24. The system of claim 23, wherein buffering component comprises:

5 an encoder configured to encode the television broadcast; and

a storage device configured to store the encoded television broadcast.

25. The system of claim 23, further comprising:

a playback component configured to play back the television signal

being buffered from a point in time at which the two-way video

10 communication was established in response to the two-way

video communication being terminated,.

26. The system of claim 15, wherein the pre-recorded video greeting is

caller-specific.

27. A system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the

15 system comprising:

a detection component configured to detect a request to establish

video communication between a caller and a user of the

interactive television system;

an identification component configured to identify the caller from

20 information contained within the request;

an answering component configured, in response to the caller being

included within an auto-answer list, to automatically send a pre-

recorded video greeting to the caller and automatically record a

video message comprising a video signal received from the
caller.

28.   A system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the
system comprising:

5   a detection component configured to detect a request to establish

video communication between a caller and a user of the

interactive television system;

an identification component configured to identify the caller from

information contained within the request;

10   a notification component configured to notify the user concerning the

identity of the caller; and

an answering component configured to send a pre-recorded video

greeting to the caller in response to the user rejecting the

request or not accepting the request within an established time

15   interval and to record a video message comprising a video

signal received from the caller;

a communication component configured, while the video message is

being recorded, to establish two-way video communication

between the user and the caller;

20   a buffering component configured to buffer a television signal being

displayed by the interactive television system; and

a playback component configured to play back the television signal

being buffered from a point in time at which the two-way video

communication was established in response to the two-way

25   video communication being terminated.

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29.   A system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the system comprising:

means for detecting a request to establish video communication between a caller and a user of the interactive television system;

5   means for identifying the caller from information contained within the request;

means for notifying the user concerning the identity of the caller; and

means for sending a pre-recorded video greeting to the caller and for recording a video message comprising a video signal received

10   from the caller in response to the user rejecting the request or not accepting the request within an established time interval,.

30.   A computer program product comprising program code for performing a method for automatically answering and recording video calls, the method comprising:

15   detecting a request to establish video communication between a caller and a user of the interactive television system;

identifying the caller from information contained within the request;

notifying the user concerning the identity of the caller; and

in response to the user rejecting the request or not accepting the

20   request within an established time interval:

sending a pre-recorded video greeting to the caller; and

recording a video message comprising a video signal received from the caller.

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